

EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

CREATING OPTIMAL LEARNING AND
DEVELOPMENT CHANCES FOR PUPILS WITH A
MIGRANT BACKGROUND IN ANTWERP

PEER REVIEW ANTWERP 22 AND 23 JANUARY 2013

EQUAL EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES POLICY IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE

CREATING OPTIMAL LEARNING AND
DEVELOPMENT CHANCES FOR PUPILS WITH A
MIGRANT BACKGROUND IN ANTWERP

PEER REVIEW ANTWERP 22 AND 23 JANUARY 2013

«The reproduction of all or part of this work, regardless of means, electronic or mechanical, is forbidden without the written consent of the authors and the editor».

«SIRIUS is not responsible for the opinions expressed in this publication».

CONTENT

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	7
The SIRIUS project	7
Peer Review aim and subject	7
Peer Review methodology.....	8
Peer Review organization.....	9
CHAPTER 2: ANTWERPS EDUCATIONAL POLICY, SYSTEM AND CONTEXT	11
EEO Policy	11
Flemish secondary education system.....	12
Educational context	13
CHAPTER 3: THE PEER REVIEWED SCHOOLS	15
School I	15
School II	17
CHAPTER 4: PEER REVIEW ANALYSES AND REFLECTIONS	19
Introduction	19
Procedure.....	19
Analyses and reflections.....	20
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	27
Introduction.....	27
Conclusions	27
Recommendations.....	29
LITERATURE	31
APPENDIX I: PRGROGRAMME	33

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The SIRIUS project

In January 2012 SIRIUS started as a network of 13 countries. The main aim of SIRIUS is to contribute in closing the achievement gap between students from native and migrant backgrounds. SIRIUS intends to develop “a powerful professional learning community across Europe to transform the education for children and youngsters from migrant background in the EU” (p. 5, Sirius position paper, draft 2012).

Among migrant students average dropout rates are higher, migrant students are over-represented in lower educational tracks and they show lower PISA scores in mathematics, science and language.

Three thematic areas are selected according to the original EU call for the SIRIUS network: policy implementation, schooling and educational support. Each thematic area has its own work package and activities. The current report lies in the area of schooling (Work package 2). In this work package we organize several peer reviews to review practices in countries within our network. This in order to help the reviewed unit to improve its program making and for the peers (and their organizations) to learn new methods in education practice to develop migrant children.

Peer Review aim and subject

The SIRIUS network expressed their interest in the Equal Educational Opportunities policy (EEO policy) in Antwerp and contacted the Center for Migration and Intercultural Studies of the University of Antwerp.

From here two secondary education schools were asked to be peer reviewed on this topic. Together we came with an assignment to inform the Center for Migration and Intercultural Studies, schools and local policy makers on *how* the schools use this EEO funding to create optimal learning and development chances for pupils with a migrant background. Besides that we also took a closer look at the differences between these schools and what schools do with parental involvement and teachers' professional development. From the SIRIUS network a team of 10 peers examined the implementation of the (EEO policy) in these two secondary schools of Antwerp.

Peer Review Methodology

In this paragraph a short explanation will be given on what peer reviewing is about.

The term Peer Review has a shared meaning when reading reports, documents etc. (Gutknecht-Gmeiner, 2007; Pagani, 2002; OECD, 2007).

Peer review is basically a systematic examination and assessment of the performance or practices of a specific unit of governance by a group of other units of the same level and range. The ultimate goal is helping the reviewed unit to improve its policy making, adopt best practices and comply with established standards and principles. The examination is conducted on a nonadversarial basis, and it relies heavily on mutual trust among the peers involved in the review, as well as on their shared confidence in the process.

The Peer Review exercise results in a report that assesses accomplishments, spells out shortfalls and makes recommendations. Every peer review has a common procedure, consisting of 3 main phases.

1. The preparatory phase

The first phase of the review often consists of background analysis and of some form of self-evaluation by the country/project under review. This phase includes work on documentation and data as well as a questionnaire. The questionnaire, which can be a sophisticated instrument, is sent to the country for responses by the competent authorities or as an agenda for a dialogue in the next phase. Peers are here recruited and trained.

2. The consultation phase

In this phase the Peer Review Visit take place. Peers visit the city and carry out their consultation. This part contains a tour of the premises (on-site visits), observations and interviews with different groups of stakeholders (such as civil servants, policy makers, teachers, principal, mentors, parents, students, researchers etc). The Peer Reviewers choose from their midst a Moderator (leading the interview) a Secretary (writing down the notes) and a Report Writer (writes afterwards the Peer Review Report with the experiences of the visit). The rest of the Peer Review team interviews, observes, discusses and also make notes to be given to the Report Writer.

3. The assessment phase

In this phase the Reporter prepares a draft of the final report, which follows a model comprising an analytical section, where the project performance is examined in detail and individual concerns are expressed, and an evaluation or summary section setting forth the conclusions and recommendations. The report in draft is shared and discussed with the Peer Review Team and with the reviewed country and may make adjustments it considers justified before the draft is submitted to the members of SIRIUS and the European Commission.

Generally, approval of the final report is by consensus, unless the procedures of the particular peer review specify otherwise. In some cases, the procedures may call for the final report to state the differences among the participants.

Often, the final report is followed by a press release, which summarizes the main issues for the media, and press events or dissemination seminars are organized to publicize the findings of the review.

And then the results and recommendations from the Peer Review are transferred into concrete actions for improvement, which are planned and implemented.

Peer Review Organization in the present context

From the Netherlands, Croatia, Germany and United Kingdom three teams of Peer-Reviewers were selected. In the table below, the participants are listed.

Participants	Function	Organization
Sabine Severiens	WP2 leader, professor	Faculty of Pedagogy, Erasmus University of Rotterdam
Tom Tudjman	Peer Review Coordinator	Risbo, Erasmus University of Rotterdam
Jone Ordoño	Peer Review Report Writer	Risbo, Erasmus University of Rotterdam
Lana Jurko	Executive Director	Network of Education Policy Centers (NEPC), Zagreb
Eli Pijaca Plavsic	Executive Director	Forum for Freedom in Education, Zagreb
Marijana Cesi	Senior Advisor	Croatian Education and Teacher Training Agency (AZOO)
Iris Marusic	Project Coordinator	Center for Educational Research and Development, University of Zagreb
Claudia Koehler	Researcher	European Forum for Migration Studies, University of Bamberg
Jacques F. Owono	Researcher	European Forum for Migration Studies, University of Bamberg
Tózzún Issa	Director	Centre for Multilingualism in Education, Metropolitan University of London

Table 1 : Peer reviewers

The peer-review took place in Antwerp on the 22nd and 23rd of January. In appendix 1 the program of the peer review visit can be found. There was an introduction to the EEO Policy by Jean-Louis Leroy, the coordinating inspector for Secondary Education of the Flemish regional

Government and a presentation of a research on EEO-policy by prof. Van Avermaet, director of the Centre for Diversity and Learning of the University of Ghent. Then, the Peer Review team visited two schools. The peers made a tour around the facilities and interviewed the following persons:

Participants function	Institution
School Principal	School I
School Principal	School II
Dutch teacher	School I
English teacher	School I
Coordinator	School I
Coordinator	School II
Dutch and E-learning teacher	School II
Physical Education teacher	School II
Chemistry and Maths teacher	School II

Table 2: Interviewees

After the introduction, the school tours and the interviews, two reflection sessions for the peer reviewers took place. During these sessions peer reviewers analyzed all the information gathered and came to remarks, conclusions and suggestions to improve the implementation of the Equal Educational Opportunities Policy in schools.



Photo 1: Peer reviewers meeting

CHAPTER 2: ANTWERPS EDUCATIONAL POLICY, SYSTEM AND CONTEXT

In this chapter we give a description of the Equal Education Opportunities (EEO) policy, and a brief outline of the Flemish Educational system and the urban educational context of the city of Antwerp.

EEO-policy

Belgium is a federal state and therefore the Flemish Government is liable for education competencies in the Flemish Community. In 2002 the Flemish Parliament, after a number of different programs and policies related to the ethnic minorities and socially disadvantaged, created the Equal Educational Opportunities policy (*Gelijke Onderwijs kansen beleid* in Dutch).

The aim of the policy is to assure that every pupil has optimal chances to learn and develop to his or her full potential and, also, to avoid exclusion, segregation and discrimination in education. It focuses on socially disadvantaged pupils.

To reach these goals the EEO policy develops four components:

1. The right to enroll a child in the school his or her parents choose.
2. The Local Consultation Platforms that links school directors, educational partners, socio-cultural organizations and local policy makers of urban areas to support the implementation of the EEO.
3. The Commission for Pupil Rights to deal with legal disputes.
4. Support by extra financing and information to put the EEO into practice on schools. (Nouwen in Self-Report Antwerp, 2012).

The awarding of additional resources depends on the proportion of pupils that match the following indicators:

- The family of the pupil receives a scholarship
- The mother of the child didn't obtain a study certificate of minimally the 3rd grade of vocational education
- The pupil lives outside his or her family
- The parents belong to a migratory population
- The home-language is not Dutch (this indicator is not sufficient by itself, must be accompanied by at least one of the above)

The assets are translated into extra teaching hours to prevent and remediate learning difficulties, to implement language skills education, to introduce intercultural education, to offer school career orientation, to work on socio-emotional development and to increase pupil and parental involvement.

Under EEO policy primary education also pursues an integrated special-needs policy which is coordinated at school cluster level.

Flemish secondary education system

Compulsory education in Flanders goes from 6 to 18 years old. For children who did not attend a minimum of 220 days of preschool education, they have to take a Dutch test.

The secondary level starts commonly at age 12. The first level contains two years and it is divided in A and B sections. A is for students that finalized primary education successfully and B for the ones that did not reach the requirements in primary education. The next levels are divided in 4 areas: general education, technical education, vocational education and art education.

General education contains languages, science and humanities subjects and is directed to higher education. Technical education offers in broad terms the same subjects as general education but in a more practical approach. Vocational education is very practical and focused on a specific job, it does not qualify students to pursue high education. Art education contains studies like, visual arts, music, drama and dance. There are also specific facilities for non-Dutch-speaking pupils like OKAN (Onthaalonderwijs voor Anderstalige Nieuwkomers), reception Dutch language education for newcomers. OKAN is being funded separately from EEO funding policies.

Schools are part of different educational networks and draw up their own curriculum and timetables. Traditionally, a distinction is made between three educational networks:

- Community education is organized by a public body called ‘Flemish Community Education’ acting under the authority of the Flemish Community.
- Subsidized publicly run schools are organized by the municipalities or the provincial administrations.
- Subsidized privately run schools deliver education organized by a private person or private organization. The governing body is often a non-profit-making organization. These schools mainly consist of catholic schools.
- (Ministry of the Flemish Community, 2005)

Educational context

The largest groups of “immigrants” in Antwerp is of Dutch origin, but the largest (non- EU) ethnic minority community are Moroccan Berber families, followed by communities of Turkish, Kurdish, Polish, African and Chinese origin. Antwerp also hosts a rather large Jewish community. In educational practice, over 60% of children in primary schools are non-native Dutch speakers (Nouwen in Self-Report Antwerp, 2012, p.4).

The average educational statistics in Antwerp are below Flemish averages, the dropout rate is higher (17%) than the usual in Flanders (12%), (OECD, 2010).

In Antwerp there are segregated areas where most of the inhabitants come from similar ethnic background and some areas ethnically very diverse. It creates differences between the neighborhoods and the educational tracks chosen. Areas with higher proportion of ethnic minorities show higher proportion of pupils in vocational education; hence the different school compositions of both schools under peer review.

CHAPTER 3: THE PEER REVIEWED SCHOOLS

The peer-review was carried out in two secondary schools. Both schools educate a large proportion of ethnic minority and socially disadvantaged pupils and provide Dutch classes for newcomers, but differ in some features:

	SCHOOL I	SCHOOL II
Population	80% Moroccan background	Ethnically heterogenic
Provision	Private (with public funding), Catholic	City of Antwerp
Type of education	Mostly vocational (also technical and first year of general). Specialized in fashion, nursery and business	General

Table 3: Population, provision and educational type of the peer reviewed schools

School I

School facts

The School I is located in a district where 41% of the residents has a migrant background and 71% of them are from Moroccan origin (Open Society Foundation, 2011).

The school has nowadays 590 students, 437 of them are female and 153 are male. The higher number of girls is because School I used to offer specialized education in fashion and nursing, two studies traditionally related to the female gender role. However, in 2000 they implement a Business specialization and the number of male students began to grow.

In the school, 95% of the pupils has a migrant background, with a majority (80%) from Moroccan origin. This ethnic minority shows particularly high dropout rates; “around half of Moroccan and Turkish origin pupils leave secondary education without a secondary education diploma, compared with 7–13 per cent of native Belgian pupils” (Open Society Foundation, 2011). At the same time, 90% of the students come from families in low socioeconomic situation.

Originally, School I is Vocational and Technical, but nowadays it also offers General Education for two main reasons. First, in order to give children from the neighborhood the opportunity to study any of the educational types in a school close to their homes. They do so because statistics

show that many parents choose the school for the proximity (80% of the pupils come from the neighborhood). And secondly to attract more students from Belgian origin as vocational education



Photo 2: Fashion students in School I

is socially related with students from ethnic minority background.

Several ethnic minority parents enroll their children in Vocational Education, likely, due to their learning difficulties in primary school and/or their low aspirations (Open Society Foundation, 2011). Indicators and tests of achievement show that at the end of primary school education, migrant children score substantially lower than native children (Stanat et al. 2007 in NESSE, 2008).

In Flanders, the delay in learning at the end of primary education between non-immigrant and immigrant children is high. “In particular, Turkish girls (52%) and Moroccan boys (46%) have the highest gap compared with Belgian pupils (13%)” (Duquet et al. 2006, in Open Society Foundation, 2011, p.64).

School structure and development

The leadership structure consist of 9 teams of 16 teachers each with a coordinator. They have regular meetings to discuss the school policy. The coordinators inform the director and deputy director and they take decisions on strategy, projects and finances.

The pedagogical project of the school is guided by the Declaration Board of Catholic Education. The aims are to grow a multicultural and multireligious coexistence, the “active care of the underprivileged”, a complete formation of the person and to set up a respectful intercultural dialogue.

In respect to the selection of the staff, 10% of the teachers has a Moroccan background.

Professional Development of the staff is done in two ways. Either, the teachers can ask the coordinator for courses to work on their needs or the school suggests the teachers courses to improve a specific skill. Besides that, training for new teachers is dedicated in dealing with classroom diversity and behavioral issues. Coordinators support them with mentoring and classroom observation.

The last years teachers development focused on pupils evaluation. The school implemented a permanent evaluation system. Like this, teachers will have constant feedback and are aware if a student does not reach the demands of the course. Then, teachers do some reflection with the pupils and work to improve.

The language policy of the school is focused on Dutch lessons for newcomers, the teachers themselves make the material for these classes. They also offer reinforced general formation in the 1st grade and Wednesday afternoons pupils have extra language classes and brush-up classes.

Parents must go to the school 4 times a year for teacher-parent meetings. In the past, they had mother-groups, but they stopped doing it because the attendance was too irregular. Besides that, the contact with parents is informal: they go to the school to discuss any concern with the teachers or the principal.

There is a commitment to be an extended school not only for students families but also for the neighborhood. They participate in activities involving the community, for example, making a float for the parade, and they carry out activities where local residents can also participate. The school also offers leisure activities after school and an internet space with multifunctional meeting area.

EEO policy funding

With the EEO funding the school employed five extra full time teachers and the number of pupils per classroom has been reduced. They also use this funding for extra-curricular activities that students could not pay for, such as speeches or artist's performances.

School II

School facts

School II is located in the center of the city of Antwerp, an area with a high population of residents from a migrant background.

The students are from several different nationalities resulting in classrooms with mixed cultures. It is an aim to keep having mixed nationalities in the classroom and avoid the concentration of children from one specific culture.

The school has grown in number of pupils in the last years: from 254 students in 2004 to 461 students at the moment. This is because in 2004 they offered OKAN (Dutch lessons for newcomers) courses and the 1st grade of secondary Vocational school. Progressively, since 2007, they implement the second and the third grade of General Education and it turned to be an ASO school (Secondary school for General Education). They also are focused on OKAN education with the premise of integrating these children in the regular education as soon as possible.

The school shares the building with a primary school and as many students come from there they are trying to improve the cooperation sharing the information between both schools (always with parents' consent).

School structure and development

The school is run by an “obliged and structured lattice of group operations” (Power Point presentation School II, 2013). This means that there are many meetings between the different staff in order to share information, solve potential issues and make improvements. The decisions are discussed by a group of teachers elected by other teachers, the coordinators and the school principal. There is also a parents and students committee formed by election that can expose their opinion in several things. There is a student counselor and external support of a psychologist. The teachers are divided in groups based on the subjects they learn. There are meetings between the director and the different people involved in the school. There is a strong focus on teamwork.

There are 75 teachers in the schools and approximately half of them are male and half female, because the school believes that is beneficial for children to have both gender teachers in the classroom.

The professional development of the teachers is an important part of the school policy. They have City School Division’s courses available and either the teacher themselves or the management asks for them. The teachers are also coached and supported to develop students counseling and to guide and plan the students’ career.

It is an aim of the school to develop a personal learning process for all their students. For that, there is a personal development plan for the pupils and they have several extracurricular activities available. They are called “club-hours” and consist in remedial and leisure afternoon courses. From Monday to Thursday, after the compulsory hours, each pupil has different lessons or workshops depending on her or his needs and interests.

In addition, with the same goal of encouraging individual learning and applying innovative teaching methods, it introduces the E-Learning concept. An intranet where teachers put in exercises and students can choose them based on their reinforcement needs, then there are corrected and given feedback by the teachers. Coordinators, principal and teachers also have access by this intranet to the information of each student.

There is a parents board, and they are obliged to go to the school four times a year to collect their children’s grade reports. The teachers can also call parents for a meeting when there is a special need or a specific problem to discuss.

EEO policy funding

The school gets around 57 extra teaching hours from the Equal Educational Opportunities policy funding. Ten of these hours are spent in OKAN, the Dutch lessons for newcomers. Consequently, School II has 3 teachers for OKAN and can help these students with special needs to integrate in the regular classrooms as soon as possible.

They also use the hours from EEO policy funding to create time for teachers to help the students more individually.

CHAPTER 4: PEER REVIEW ANALYSES AND REFLECTIONS

Introduction

From the data collected by the inspectorate of the Flemish Regional Government we know that the number of children with special needs is growing in secondary education. The mobility of the migrant people nowadays makes that population in schools change fast and several institutions are reluctant to adapt their structure to the new characteristics of their pupils. Schools become extremely diverse very quickly and teachers and other staff do not have time to develop skills by themselves to deal with that.

The presentation about the Research in EEO Policy carried out by Prof. Van Avermaet exposes that schools are not taking into account the present cultural diversity and constant mobility of some pupils. At the same time, the “testing culture”, that is, the implementation of standardized exams to evaluate students’ knowledge and direct their career, is increasing. These developments create more segregated schools.

Van Avermaet argues it is beneficial to mix students with learning difficulties with those with more developed skills to prevent academic failure.

His study shows that the Socio Economical Situation of the students is not so important for school achievement compared to the expectations of the teachers on their pupils. It is important that the teachers have the ability to teach children from any background and to give them confidence in their academic capacities (Van Avermaet, 2010).

Procedure

The Peer Review team has analyzed all their interview material and combined these findings with what they heard from presentations and seen in the schools. Next it is described how the information during the peer visit was collected.

The visits to both schools started with a short presentation by the Directors including statistics, students' profiles, mission, practical things, etc. Then, Peer Reviewers visited schools' facilities guided by the staff and have the opportunity to see the infrastructure, the material, and how some lessons are given.



Photo 3: Peer Reviewers visiting one of the schools

Finally, the interviews took place. To carry them out Peer Reviewers split in three groups: one group interviewed the Director, another group the teachers and another one the Coordinators. The questions were made before the visit in a Peer Reviewers meeting.

During the interviews, Peer Reviewers asked about the EEO policy funding, how it is allocated in the school; about parents involvement, to what extent they are involved and how the school encourage it; about multiculturalism, how the migrant background of the students is approached in the school; and about what they wish to achieve or change in the future. Also, the directors were asked about leadership structure, teacher selection and relation with inspectorate and government. The coordinators and teachers were asked about Professional Development, conflicts with students and support from the management.

The Peer Reviewers did not interview students nor parents in none of the schools, but they had the chance to have small chat with some of the pupils during the visit to the facilities.

Analyses and reflections

School I

Organization

School I has a total of 120 teachers and they have a coordinator for every group of 16 teachers. These groups work as a team and they have regular meetings to coordinate themselves and support each other. The coordinator works as a go-between, he or she communicates to the director the concerns, the suggestions and other matters from the teachers; for instance, the teachers can ask the coordinator for funding for a specific activity and the coordinator would ask for it at the principal. Coordinators also have contact with external professionals, such as youth workers. Although plans are shared among everyone and comments and suggestions from the school team are taken seriously, the decision making structure can be seen as hierarchical.

Multiculturalism

It is not a policy of School I to offer intercultural education classes, although there are several teachers with Moroccan background. The aim is to make them a model for the students, but teachers

feel that in some cases they are perceived by pupils as suspiciously and “unfair” to their culture of origin. It could be so because the teachers interviewed think that their “students have to move between two worlds and therefore adopt two identities” and, as the Moroccan teachers represent the culture at school, they are seen as too ‘western’ by students.

Students are not allowed to speak their home language in the classroom, only on the playground. Also, even if 90% of the students are Muslims I they have compulsory catholic religion lessons.

Furthermore, girls cannot wear a headscarf when they are inside the school. The reasons, according to the school, are that school is a “safe place” and they must see it like a family that is why everyone has to look the same. And secondly, in order to get used to the working life, where in certain jobs headscarves are not allowed either.

Teachers think that they deal with diversity in an effective way. They know that they have built strong relationships with the children because often they trust the teachers to help them with personal problems. The teachers in the interview conclude that they are the only ones in pupils’ lives from the “western-values-world” and they have to build bridges between the two cultures.

Parents

The parents are not involved in an organizational basis, the director affirms that there is an “open school policy” so parents can go to discuss any concern. But, actually, most of the parents just go to the school four times a year because it is an obligation. The teachers see the importance of the parental involvement to carry out several projects, but they do not know how to encourage them to participate. They carry out activities as, for example, performances made by the students themselves to try to motivate parents to come to school.

On the other hand, most of the parents have a very low educational level or they are not fluent in Dutch so they are not able to help their children with their homework. The teachers are aware of some parents’ illiteracy and they use a sticker system to inform about children’s attitude, that is, if parents see a red stick in the students’ agenda means that the teacher wants to have a meeting with them.

Professional development

It seems that on School I professional development is not a key priority. Teachers themselves have to ask their coordinator for courses and the management suggest areas to improve, but it does not seem to be a priority in school’s policy.

However, the coordinators support new teachers with mentoring and classroom observations. This is important because of the high diversity in the classroom. The assistance of the coordinators helps new teachers to get used to deal with behavioral problems, cultural issues and “many unwritten rules” concerning to the pupils’ migrant background.

Equal Educational Opportunities policy

The funding coming from Equal Educational Opportunities policy is used mainly for extra teaching hours. This means that the school can have more teachers and coordinators. Consequently, they have been able to make smaller groups; at the moment they are 14 pupils in each classroom and in the past there were 20.

The Peer Reviewers are very positive with the small number of students per classroom. In the Dutch classes for newcomers having two teachers per room is very helpful for the special needs of these students. Also, considering that a lot of material is being developed by themselves it is important to have more time and human resources. This has an effect in the high motivation and positive attitude of teachers.

The extra hours of EEO policy funding are also spent in team meetings and in administrative work done by the coordinators. It is a requirement that the school has to build a portfolio, an action plan for the inspectorate. At the same time, they make a self-reflection report and they established a pupil follow system. This comes from the school policy, so it must be done besides the EEO, but due to the control of the inspectorate and the extra hours they have now it is done in a “more precisely and in-depth way”.

The Director doubts if EEO policy decreases the gap of education opportunities of low socioeconomic background pupils. He commented that EEO did not influence their project, because they already had a coordinator doing the same work before EEO was implemented. He stressed the fact that there is a need to have more support with problems that are not school-related, such as recruiting a psychologist and working with social services. There are Pupil Guidance Centers (CLB) that provide multidisciplinary guidance for students at risk of dropping out due to their social background, but parents have to take the initiative to ask for its service.

Teachers think that the freedom parents have to choose the school for their children *increases* segregation, because the highly educated ones often are better informed than the parents in a low socioeconomic situation, they know the system, and choose “white schools”. The Director commented that this “freedom” makes that some students can enroll while the year is already started and it is problematic for school to integrate these children.

Wishes and challenges

The Peer Reviewers asked their interviewees on challenges and wishes for the future. The biggest challenges the coordinators face in School I are, first, to build a working team where teachers support each other, are happy and work together to achieve the same objectives. Second, they have to deal with tensions between the students. And, finally, coordinators have a responsibility to help new teachers successfully integrate in the school.

In the future, the school wishes to have more students from a Flemish background and from families with a middle socio economic situation. They think that this will be an advantage for the

Dutch learners. Also a more heterogenic school would give the students the chance to learn from different cultures, to hear different opinions and to know several traditions and ways of living.

Coordinators as well would like to be more supported to deal with non-educational problems of the children, so every student can achieve a complete development. For this, they wish to have a psychologist.

Finally, the school wants to improve its infrastructure and introduce the technological advantages in the classrooms. The institution is making a big effort to modernize and improve the school adding new classrooms, multimedia boards and material. Therefore, a big part of the *general* funding goes to renewing the building and buying material.

School II

Organization

In School II there is a strong focus on teamwork. There are several meetings between the school staff and most of the decisions are made in consultation. The leadership is shared and seems to be horizontal. They also have external support from the city schools division, youth advisors and psychologist for special needs.

There are mentors for the new teachers and, in general, the teachers feel quite supported by the school and by other colleagues, according to the words of one of the teachers interviewed: “when you fall, there is always someone to catch you”. There seems to be a warm work climate and a highly motivated team with satisfied teachers.

Multiculturalism

The school does not allow children to speak their home language in the classroom. The reason for this is that they say that school is the only place where they speak Dutch and so it is better for them in becoming fluent in the language; as a teacher said: “if they don’t speak it (Dutch) here, where do they speak it?”.

Wearing a headscarf is not allowed in school because religious signs are prohibited.

The Peer Reviewers got the feeling that cultural differences between students are not part of the school (EEO) policy. Upon asking interviewees, they said that they do not think that it is important to get knowledge about the students’ culture of origin.

Parents

Although there is a parents committee, most parents are not involved in school, they just go 4 times a year to collect their children’s grades. Teachers mentioned that, usually, parents start participating more in the school when they learn Dutch and they know how the institution works

(for example, when they know that there is a parents committee or that they can ask for parent-teacher meetings).

Teachers think that many parents encourage their children to pursue a specific career and most of the times they are not being realistic with their children skills to success. Teachers also think that parents have too high expectations for their kids. Peer reviewers are concerned about this statement. There is a risk that the school in order to be more “realistic” directs pupils to have lower aspirations because of their low socio economic background.

Professional development

In the school there is room for professional development. It is mostly done in courses offered by the City School’s Division and the school has started a peer observation system. Teachers can ask themselves for courses but they are also obliged to attend the courses allocated by the coordinator or the principal. Teachers that have extra hours from the EEO policy funding have the opportunity to spend them on their professional development.

EEO policy

The funding of the school comes from different sources and it is all managed by the City School’s Division. It administrates the money and the school have to make justified reports to ask for it. Because of all the different funding sources, the school does not know how much of their funding is coming particularly from EEO policy.

Mainly, there is a positive opinion about the EEO policy. Teachers think that the small classroom groups due to the EEO policy funding extra hours are beneficial since the students get a more individualized support. Hence, the EEO policy is important to prevent grade retention.

Still, the school thinks that to get funding for extra hours the EEO policy involves too much administrative work. The coordinators have to spend a lot of time in workshops, organization, action planning and filling in documents.

School II puts a strong focus on OKAN, Dutch lessons for newcomers. They put some of the EEO extra teaching hours in it because it is important that these students are integrated as soon as possible in the regular educational tracks. For OKAN, the school gets extra funding from the Flemish government. This source of funding is to be regarded independently from EEO funding (Nouwen, 2012).

The interviewees comment that the Flemish enrollment policy, i.e. that parents are free to enroll their children in the school of their choice, does not work in practice, because several schools manage to facilitate the enrollment of some children and complicate the enrollment of others.

Wishes and challenges

The Peer Reviewers asked their interviewees about challenges and wishes for the future. One of the main challenges is to reduce study arrears, for that they offer additional lessons, OKAN classrooms and a personalized teaching method for each student. The objective is to reduce as much as possible the number of pupils that repeat a year. The focus is on competency learning with variable learning methods in meaningful contexts to provoke self-reflection and informed choices.

To achieve this, the school is expanding the individual teaching. They are building an educational system that adapts to each students' needs in order to work on their learning difficulties and develop their abilities. It is an important tool to reduce achievement gaps.

The school also wants to improve the networking, not only between the school staff, but also with the primary school that is in the same building.

The wishes for the future involve improving the infrastructure. They would like to have a bigger playground and renew the building. Also, the director wants to have more professional development opportunities for her teachers.

Finally, the school staff would like to have more students from a Flemish background. The reason is that mixing different cultures both, students from a migrant background and from a local background, would have less prejudices about each other. At the same time, the principal thinks that the reputation of the school would improve because parents with Flemish backgrounds would start seeing the quality of education at SCHOOL II.

CHAPTER 5: FINAL REMARKS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The SIRIUS network was interested in the Equal Education Opportunities policy in Antwerp. The Centre for Migration and Intercultural Studies of the University of Antwerp organized a peer review for SIRIUS in two schools on the implementation of EEO policy there.

In this last chapter we will summarize the Peer-Review reflections and give some recommendations for future improvement.

Conclusions

1. It is a great advantage that due to the Equal Educational Opportunities policy the schools obtain extra hours to employ **more teachers**. Therefore, the number of pupils in each **classroom is small** and the teachers can be conscious of the needs and capacities of each pupil and adapt their lessons. This support is essential for newcomers and other students with special needs. Probably by this extra care and emphasis on team work, the teachers are enthusiastic about their profession. Peer Reviewers perceived a positive attitude towards the schools and the students.
2. However, it is an issue for some schools to deal with the **administrative tasks** that comes with the EEO policy funding. We think that it is important to make action plans and reports, but they must be made in order to facilitate the implementation of the policy in the school and not be an obstacle for the performance of the duties of the professionals.
3. The peer-review team noticed there are **no** pedagogical guidelines within the EEO policy to develop **intercultural education** in the school. The schools know that they get funding for extra hours because of the low socioeconomic background of their students, but they do not get any advice on how to support intercultural coexistence in the school and help the educational success of all their pupils.

For example, the UNESCO guidelines for intercultural education (2006) recommend that teacher training programs raise awareness of the educational and cultural needs of minority groups, train teachers' skills to adapt educational contents, methods and materials to students' needs and facilitate the application of diversity as a tool in the classroom to benefit the learner.

Along the same point, the peer reviewers have some concerns regarding the encouragement of immigrant students to live and show their cultural backgrounds. It seems the school wants them to adopt the culture of the countries' ethnic majority group. Examples of this are the forbidden use of mother-tongue and the headscarf.

Nevertheless, in School I the peer reviewers noted a pedagogical project to set up a multicultural coexistence and an intercultural dialogue by organizing a variety of multicultural activities. They are carried out punctually and as extracurricular and leisure events to involve parents and neighbors and to motivate the children. This seems to be a good starting point for introducing intercultural education in a more profound way.

4. The **parental involvement** in both schools appears to be very low. Although peer reviewers did not have a chance to speak to parents, they do not seem to participate actively in their sons and daughters academic education and they let school manage all the aspects of it. However, if the children do not perceive interest for their education at home it can result in a lower incentive to study and a poorer school belonging.

According to the interviewees, many **parents** of the students in low socio-economic situation, do not seem to have enough information about the education system. Many of them **choose the school** for their sons and daughters based on the geographical proximity, rather than on their aspirations. Most of the schools offer one or two types of education so being enrolled in one or another directs the career of the pupil. It seems that parents do not know the importance of electing the type of education according to the student aspirations and skills.

5. The peer reviewers note that for policy makers (and politicians) it seems important to reconsider the education system; now it is very difficult to move between educational tracks due to the large differences in their programs.

We think that such a **rigid system** causes more inequality as it urges to classify the students' aspirations from an early age and with little chance to change. Studies show that less than 0.5% of Vocational and Technical students move to higher tracks between 2004 and 2007 (OECD, 2010).

Also, the peer reviewers want to underline the interviewees notion that EEO policy seems to increase segregation. There is a concentration of minorities in some communities of Antwerp, so choosing the nearby school gives a high density of children with an ethnic minority background in school institutions, as in School I.

6. Regarding the **Teachers Professional Development**, it seems that in School II there is a stronger focus in this area than in School I. In School II it is part of the school policy, it is obliged and structured and they spend some of the EEO policy extra hours on it. In School I, however, it seems the management does not encourage the teachers to professionally develop to a large extent.

Recommendations

To improve and get better results out of EEO funding, the peer reviewers make the following recommendations for both schools:

1. Introduce in the school curriculum education about migration.

The peer review team believes that study programs should take into consideration the current situation of the Flemish society, which is formed by individuals coming from several cultures. To build a sympathetic attitude towards people from a different ethnical background it will be important to give formation about the different cultures that live in Flanders, the main reasons to immigrate to another countries, the situation and difficulties of migrant people and their contributions to the development of the country.

2. Offer teacher training in interculturalism, teaching methodology with ethnical minorities and home language of the pupils.

To grow an intercultural coexistence it is fundamental that teachers and counselors are trained in the knowledge of different cultures and the management of a successful interaction between them. Also, for the teachers, to be familiar with specific methodologies to teach to children with migrant background and to solve possible conflicts and cultural issues.

At the same time, it would be a benefit to get knowledge of the mother tongue of the students to support them in the use of it. The right to one's own language is important in enabling students to develop a strong positive self-image. In addition, people generally find it easier to develop complex thinking in their first language (NCCA, 2008).

3. Increase the participation and the realistic aspirations of the parents.

It is important to involve the parents in school activities so the school can bring the communities together. Also, to empower them to have high and realistic academic objectives for their children. Sometimes schools can be reluctant to put high aspirations on their students as they are afraid of drop outs due to their difficult socioeconomic situation. As a result, they direct the pupils to less ambitious choices and several times this means the vocational track. The opinion of the school is very powerful because, as we commented in chapter 4, many parents in low socioeconomic situation are not informed about the education system and they entrust the school to manage their children's career.

4. Make informed choices in the implementation of EEO

It is a privilege that schools have a certain amount of freedom in implementing the EEO funding. At the same time it is difficult to choose the right things. As we have seen at SCHOOL I they already did certain actions *before* EEO came by. That means that a school should look closely to what already is being done in their school, at evidence based practices in the case of schooling for immigrant children, and decide where EEO funding can make a difference in their own situation.

LITERATURE

Avermaet, P. van (2010). *Research on EEO-policy*. Centre for Diversity and Learning: University of Ghent.

Gutknecht-Gmeiner, M. (eds.) (2007). *European Peer Review Manual for initial VET*. oibf: Vienna.

Leroy, J.L. (2013). *Introduction to EEO-policy (GOK)*. Inspectorate for Secondary Education: Flemish Regional Government.

Ministry of the Flemish Community (2005). *The Flemish educational landscape in a nutshell*. Educational Information and Documentation Division.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2008). *Every teacher has a role*. Intercultural Education in the School, Guidelines for Schools. NCCA: Ireland.

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2008). *Intercultural Education in the Primary School and Intercultural Education in the Post-Primary School*. NCCA: Ireland.

NESSE (2008) *Education and Migration. Strategies for integrating migrant children in European schools and societies*. Report for the European Commission for Education and Culture

Nouwen, W. (2012). *Self report Antwerp*. CeMIS: University of Antwerp

OECD (2007). *Peer Review: a Tool for Co-operation and Change*. Policy Brief, January 2007.

OECD (2010). *Learning for jobs, Belgium (Flandes)*. Review of Vocational Education

Open Society Foundation (2011). *MuslSchool I in Antwerp*. At home in Europe project.

Pagani, F. (2002) *Peer Review as a tool for co-operation and change. An analysis of an OECD working method*. African Security Review.

UNESCO (2006). *Guideline for Intercultural Education*.

APPENDIX I: PROGRAMME

January 21st, arrival of participants
Radisson Blu Park Lane Hotel, Antwerp

18:00	Meeting of Peer Reviewers in the hotel lobby
19.00	Welcome dinner at hotel

January 22nd, day 1

Time	Activity	Participants	Venue
9:00-9:45	Introduction to EEO-policy by Jean-Louis Leroy, Coordinating Inspector for Secondary Education of the Flemish Regional Government	All	Hotel Radisson Blu Park Lane (34 Van Eycklei)
9:45-10.30	Presentation of research on EEO-policy by Prof. Piet Van Avermaet, former Policy Research Centre EEO, currently director of Centre for Diversity and Learning	All	Hotel
10.30-12	Finalizing the questionnaires for teachers, EEO coordinators and schools principals	Peer review team	Hotel
12-13	Lunch	Peer review team	Hotel
13-13.30	Travel to School I		
13.30-15	Tour and first introduction to the school		School I
15-17	Interviews with school staff: parallel sessions with school's principal, teachers and coordinators.	Peer review team Interviewees: teachers, principal and coordinators	School I
17- 17.30	Travel back to the Hotel		
17.30-19.00	Preliminary analyses of the interviews	Peer review team	Hotel
20:00	Dinner at Lamalo, Mediterranean Restaurant	Peer review team + Organizers	Lamalo Restaurant

January 23rd, day 2

Time	Activity	Participants	Venue
9 – 10	Tour and first introduction to School II	All	School II
10-12:30	Interviews with school staff: parallel sessions with school's principal, teachers and coordinators.	Peer review team Interviewees: teachers, principal and coordinators	School II
12:30- 13:30	Lunch	Peer review team	Hotel
13:30- 15:30	Preliminary analyses and conclusions of the interviews	Peer review team	Hotel



This project is co-funded by
the European Union

